

Good afternoon, Chairman King, Ranking Member Thompson and Members of the Committee.

I'm Steve Lenkart, Director of Legislative Affairs for the **International Brotherhood of Police Officers**, representing federal, state and local police officers from around the country. Before coming to Washington, I served for 14 years as a police officer, firefighter and emergency medical technician in and around the city of Chicago.

My comments this afternoon are also shared by the **Major Cities Chiefs**, an organization that represents police executives from more than 150 major metropolitan areas; by the **National Troopers Coalition**, an organization representing 30,000 state trooper and highway patrol officers throughout the nation; and by the **National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives**, representing executive and command officers from all levels within the law enforcement community.

All four of these organizations are members of the Law Enforcement Steering Committee, currently in its 21st year of operation on Capitol Hill. I have had the honor of serving as its chairman since January of 2004.

Mr. Chairman, the last time I appeared before this committee was in September of 2004 when I testified before the Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness and Response on the necessity of complete integration of law enforcement functions into the National Incident Management System.

Much has happened since that time. I was concerned back then, as many of my colleagues were also, that the United States didn't have solid procedures in place to handle a large-scale incident efficiently, be it a natural disaster or human-induced. To the credit of this committee, you had the same concerns and as a result, stepped forward to redefine how America prepares and responds to its threats and disasters. Over the past few years, this committee has demonstrated how solid policy ideas can trump politics, and for that I commend all of you. In addition, because these policy ideas are written with regard to their practical application to the real world, and not how they appear on paper in Congress, these ideas garner a tremendous amount of support from the law enforcement and other first responder communities.

I. The Department of Homeland Security, FEMA, and National Preparedness and Response.

This committee is again taking the lead in public safety and emergency response by putting forth the idea of consolidating the operations of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) with the responsibilities of the Directorate of Emergency Preparedness under the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), combining them to create a new Directorate of Emergency Management. It is important to note that the idea to create a new directorate was developed after extensive outreach and discussions with every conceivable stakeholder in national preparedness and response.

As a result, the draft language that the committee has constructed embraces the most important element vital to the success of any emergency management operation: the relationship between preparedness and response. For some reason, the relationship between preparedness and response is viewed by many as a tug of war: Is our priority to invest in preparedness and prevention, or is our priority to invest in responding quickly and recovering completely?

Mr. Chairman, that's like asking: Which should come first, the chicken or the egg? The answer is simple: It doesn't matter because one can't exist without the other.

You cannot be prepared without the means for a proper response, and you cannot respond properly without being prepared.

The draft language incorporates this concept by moving these two pillars of emergency management under one roof, a move that is long overdue. Then the language takes this concept further by elevating emergency management within DHS by establishing a legally-qualified undersecretary to oversee the directorate, and establishing two qualified deputy undersecretaries as the chiefs of preparedness and response.

In addition, the Undersecretary is given a direct line of communication to the president during Incidents of National Significance, and thus, a clear chain of command is instantly established. I'd like to take a moment to explain why these changes within the senior management structure are so critical.

II. The Importance of Accountability and Procedure.

By now, most people are very familiar with the results of our response to Hurricane Katrina. Hurricane Katrina was an unmitigated disaster by any definition and devastated a large region of the country. We've spent a lot of time and energy in trying to figure out who failed and how, which has resulted in a great deal of finger pointing. None of that excessive finger pointing would have been necessary if an efficient, well-polished and practiced plan had been in effect. The breakdown in the chain of command could have been pin-pointed and not lost in the ambiguities of who had what authority and responsibility, and who didn't.

The loss of chain of command was the key to a total systematic failure of rescue and recovery operations after Katrina hit which exposed gaping holes in our nation's response. I want to point out that while a systematic failure occurred, some elements of emergency response continued to operate, such as the Coast Guard, certain state agencies, and many localized first responder efforts. These efforts were forced to run independently but they were able to do so because they had the flexibility to operate under extreme circumstances. They had this flexibility because these smaller operations had within them two core components of emergency management: Accountability and Procedure.

Accountability and procedure within emergency management allows all entities involved to adjust to contingencies quickly, move resources in a timely manner, and to continue with the overall mission which is to preserve life and begin immediately on the road to recovery.

By placing preparedness and response under one Undersecretary, and by placing the responsibility for each under two chief deputies, we are closing the infinite loop of accountability and procedure for emergency management. Perhaps there is no message of greater importance that I can provide than the significance of continuity in accountability and procedure during emergency operations.

This simple equation of bring preparedness and response within working distance of each other under one department can revolutionize how we respond to emergency situations, can decrease uncertainty along the chain of command and can strengthen our ability to react quickly to other emergencies that often arise from the original incident, such as the levy breaks in New Orleans after the hurricane struck.

III. The Benefit to States and Local Communities.

In addition to these vital structural changes within the federal government, the draft language also extends to state and local jurisdictions the opportunity to become better prepared and integrated into a much larger system. This integration is lacking in many areas of the country and while certain improvements were made in recent years, we still have a long way to go before we can consider ourselves properly prepared. This addition of crucial resources is provided under a design of programs constructed to provide guidance and assistance where it is needed, and to ensure our communities take the proper steps to ready themselves without the federal government taking charge at the local level.

The different programs and offices are too numerous to mention in my comments today, however I would like to emphasize a few of them:

- The establishment of regional emergency management offices with mandated staff training to more effectively coordinate and integrate local efforts, including inventory and use of private sector resources;
- The establishment of an Emergency Management Advisory Council composed of national and local specialists to ensure representation at all levels and all areas of concern to the Secretary, including an assessment of essential capabilities;
- Several offices to assist with grants, planning, training and education;
- The establishment of an office for emergency communications to take further the mission of interoperability as supported by leading communications organizations such as the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials International; and
- Proactive, additional safeguards against waste, fraud and abuse.

Mr. Chairman, it has been my experience that this committee is resolved to finding solutions to very tough questions, and is careful to avoid the addition of unnecessary bureaucracy while seeking remedy. When you ask the right questions to the right people, you get the right answers. This is why the actions of your committee, including the issues discussed today, are so widely supported by law enforcement and other first responders. I appreciate the great burden that this committee has accepted on behalf of the American people, and on behalf of the International Brotherhood of Police Officers and my colleagues in the national law enforcement community,

we look forward to continuing our work with you to further prepare our country for any crisis.

Thank you.

Testimony by

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for the 21st Century”

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